

Sustainability Innovations  
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In a market as competitive as today companies are always looking for ways to be sustainable while remaining ethically responsible. In last weeks lecture, Seray Ergene spoke about the many needs of sustainability within the fashion industry. Ergene teaches at URI as a strategic management business professor and studies many sustainability practices. The needs for sustainability in the fashion world are at an all-time high. There are many ethical issues in the modern day supply chain. Many materials pose environmental issues to our Earth, factories in certain countries do not uphold ethical standards in their workplace, and the use of harmful chemicals are forcing producers and consumers to look towards innovative solutions to these problems.

Sustainability is extremely important and necessary in the fashion industry although it is often overlooked. People are unaware of the potential environmental costs of producing clothes. Companies are using new textiles, colors, and fabrics without fully understanding the potential environmental costs at which to do so. This is causing a revolution in production and forcing companies to find new sustainable ways to produce clothing. The supply chain within the fashion industry is generally very fragmented which makes it difficult to locate where an item came from. In addition to this, manufacturers are constantly looking for ways to lower costs. However, sometimes that may result in unsafe working conditions for employees, possible illegal employment or human trafficking. Reducing material costs can translate into illegal logging, toxic dyes, and fossil-fuel based materials. Illegal logging threatens many endangered rainforests in places like Brazil where this remains a huge environmental concern. As Ergene stated in the lecture we need innovative solutions to these problems.

Companies must uphold a reasonable ethical standard in the workplace. The implementation of auditors has gained popularity in the global fashion industry. Auditors go to many factories to check standards, payroll, benefits, fire codes, wages and other workplace concerns. They report the specific chemicals that are used in production, wastewater treatments, and certify the business dependent on conditions of the workplace. Many people are concerned that auditing may not be enough. This is because factories in other countries have different laws and regulations than in America. In order to fix this, many companies work with study groups to facilitate mobile phone surveys to give employees a chance to share their honest opinions about the working conditions and benefits. In addition to this, a recent technological innovation called supply chain mapping is a software platform that visually maps the entire supply chain through a database for companies. This can allow the production process to be more transparent for both employees and consumers. These innovations are constantly evolving as time passes.

Many materials pose environmental issues to our Earth. Materials and dyes are the main focus of companies trying to be more sustainable. Companies are becoming more conscious of their materials and sourcing things like organic and non-GMO cotton. There are many animal-related issues when sourcing things like wool and leather. There are many new fibers being introduced every day such as biosynthetic fibers. We learned how they consist of natural renewable resources. The shift to biobased materials from products made from fossil fuels has emitted fewer greenhouse gases over the course of their production cycle. Biosynthetics have the possibility of reducing environmental impacts compared to petrochemical-based fibers.

Innovation within the fashion industry is evolving every day. As consumers become more conscious of the supply chains involved in the clothes they wear, producers must find new innovative ways to keep their businesses sustainable, profitable, and ethical. The use of creative and innovative technologies are helping to fix some of the ethical concerns that go on behind the scenes of the fashion industry. As the problems within the industry evolve, so must the solutions to them. In a market as competitive as today's, only the most innovative companies will stand the test of time.